



NEW LIFE

BIBLE-PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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"For the Word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ" (Rev 1:9)

Vol. 11 No. 31

LORD'S DAY 5 AUGUST 2007

From the PREACHER'S HEART

SO CLOSE AND YET SO FAR (1)

Introduction

There is a need for us to once again examine who is truly a Christian. But I know that this word 'Christian' has been so misused and misunderstood that I rather use the word 'believer' to separate true Christian from professing Christian, to separate the wheat from the tares, to separate the goats from the sheep.

Then again, I am afraid soon, the same misrepresentations will befall the word 'believer'. For men is never short of ideas to misconstrue what it really mean to be a believer. This question of 'who is truly a Christian' has really to do with the fundamental issue of salvation. There are far too many people in the world today who have no hesitation to claim that they are Christian based solely on the fact that they have received infant baptism or infant dedication, they attend church service every Sunday, they have a bible at home which they read everyday, and they are religiously pious in their Christian faith.

With this in mind, and if God willing, from this week's article and in those to come in the next few weeks, I would like to show from scripture, and with the help of Matthew Mead's (1629-1699) discourse on "The Almost Christian Discovered", that many people may have no hesitation to profess, or even to confess that they are Christian, "and yet be but almost a Christian". They are so close and yet so far to be a Christian.

Example of one who came so close and yet so far to be a Christian

We read in Acts 26:28 that there is one who came so close, so convinced about the gospel of Christ which Paul so effectively presented that this man, by the name of Agrippa, replied Paul with these words, "*Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian*".

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Agrippa was so moved, his conscience was stirred to the point of believing and becoming a Christian, yet he would not be converted, though he was convinced; “his conscience was touched, though his heart was not renewed.”

What about you? You who have heard of the salvation which God in His great mercy offer to sinners freely through His only begotten Son Jesus Christ. Are you convinced by the truth of the gospel to be a Christian? What then is to be a Christian?

To be a Christian is to be a disciple of Jesus Christ, one who believes in and follow Christ. But more than that, a true Christian/believer is also one who “embraces, owns and follows the doctrine of Jesus Christ.

To the people of the world, a Christian is nothing more than one who professes to be one and nothing more than one who is attending church regularly and engaging in many Christian activities and even teaching in the church.

But to the God of the bible, a Christian is one who “*keep (his) commandments*” (John 14:15); he is one who is a fool to the world (1 Cor 1:21; 1 Cor 2:14), he is one who daily “*deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow (Christ)*” (Mark 8:34), and he is one who “*overcometh the world*” (1 John 5:4). Having listed these, I would add that to be a Christian is more than these.

I hope to further show in the forthcoming article that “There are very many in the world that are almost and yet, but almost Christians. Many are near heaven and, yet, are never the nearer. Many are within a little of salvation and, yet, shall never enjoy the least of salvation. They are within sight of heaven and, yet, shall never have a sight of God.”

The purpose of the these articles is not, as Matthew Mead says, “to break the bruised reed, nor to quench the smoking flax; not to discourage the weakest believer”, but to awaken the “sleepy professor” and “the close hypocrite discovered, and that the vile may be uncovered to show the true Christian as characterised by scripture.

Yours warmly in Christ
Mok

(*) Note: All quotations excluding Bible verses are taken from Matthew Mead’s discourse on “The Almost Christian Discovered”

DO YOU KNOW THE WESTMINSTER CONFSSION OF FAITH?

(Adapted from Life B-P Church bulletin dated 22 July 2007)

According to our church constitution, article 4.1, *“The doctrine of the Church shall be in accordance with that system commonly called “the Reformed Faith” as expressed in the Confession of Faith as set forth by the historic Westminster Assembly together with the Larger and Shorter Catechisms.”* If you have not heard about the Westminster Assembly before, the following introduction, which Dr John Richardson wrote for a study guide on the *Confession*, may be of help:

“The Westminster Assembly convened in Westminster Abbey in London on July 1, 1643. This body engaged in honest and thoughtful activity for five years, six months, and twenty-two days. Thoroughness is conspicuous in all of its work. Church historians agree that this was one of the most learned bodies ever assembled on this earth for the formulation and promulgation of Christian truth. The personnel of this body was composed of the intellectual cream of the British Isles. Every member was carefully selected on the basis of learning and intellectual gifts.

This group of divines was characterized also by deep and genuine spirituality. These men were spiritual giants. For the full period of their labors it was their custom to set aside one entire day of each month for prayer and fasting. The men who composed this assembly were, therefore, prepared intellectually and spiritually for their task.

In our day of renewed interest in Biblical theology it is well to remember that the primary rule these servants of Christ laid down for themselves, to guide in all their discussions, was: “What any man undertakes to prove as necessary, he shall make good out of Scripture.” Every member was required to take the following vow, and it was read to all of the members every Monday morning: “I do seriously promise and vow, in the presence of Almighty God, that in this Assembly whereof I am a member, I will maintain nothing in point of doctrine but what I believe to be most agreeable to the Word of God; nor in point of discipline, but what may make most for God's glory and the peace and good of His church.”

Present in this body of men were some of the most brilliant of contemporary philosophers, but they permitted not one iota of human philosophy to influence their creedal statements. Their sole objective was to think Biblically and to express the mind of Scripture. The success of this undertaking is evidenced in the fact that although better than three centuries have passed since the publication of this work, the Confession of Faith has needed no significant change during all this time.

Richard Baxter, a contemporary of the Westminster divines, wrote in his autobiography an evaluation of this assembly. He affirmed: “The Divines there congregated were men of eminent learning, godliness, ministerial abilities and...

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fidelity; and being not worthy to be one of them myself, I may the more speak the truth, even in the face of malice and envy, that. as far as I am able to judge by the information of all history of that time, and by any other evidence left us, the Christian world, since the days of the apostles, had never a Synod of more excellent divines (taking one thing with another), than this and the Synod of Dort.” Dean Stanley of the Anglican church declared that of all Protestant Confessions the Westminster Confession exhibits “far more depth of theological insight than any other.”

Fair-minded scholars must concede that the goal that the Westminster Assembly kept before it of giving “to the accepted Bible system of truth a complete, impregnable statement, to serve as a bulwark against error, as a basis of ecclesiastical fellowship and cooperation, and as a safe and effectual instrument for the religious instruction of the people of God and their children,” has been attained in a marvelous way. Judged by any sensible standard the Westminster Assembly ranks among the greatest of the ecclesiastical assemblies or councils in the entire history of Christianity.”

According to the church historian, Philip Schaff, “A creed or rule of faith is a confession of faith for public use or a form of words setting forth with authority certain articles of faith which are regarded by the framers as necessary for salvation, or at least for the well-being of the Christian church. A creed may cover the whole ground of Christian doctrines or contain only one such point as decreed fundamental and sufficient for the Christian faith.”

Is there a biblical basis for creeds and confessions? Yes, there is. The beliefs of the early church were collectively called ‘the faith which was once delivered unto the saints’ (Jude 3; cf. Galatians 1:23; 1 Timothy 4:1; 6:10,21). Believers were responsible to contend earnestly for it (i.e. to protect it from being corrupted by any false teaching), and also to transmit it faithfully to the next generation (2 Timothy 1:13; 2:2).

One of the first confessions is found in what Peter said in Matthew 16:16 – “*Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.*” Martha made the same confession in John 11:27 – “*Yea, Lord: I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world.*” This developed later on into the Apostles’ Creed in the 2nd century and the Nicene Creed in AD 325. The Westminster Confession of Faith was written after the 16th century Protestant Reformation, and it therefore encapsulates Reformed theology. It must be remembered however, that no matter how excellent a creed or confession may be it is always of subordinate authority to the Bible and can never replace it.

There are some who think that creeds and confessions are only for theologians to study and are not very useful for Christians. However in this present age of spiritual declension and doctrinal confusion, every Bible-believing church ought to have a comprehensive statement of beliefs that is based on the Scriptures.

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In the *Maranatha Bible-Presbyterian Church Fifth Anniversary Magazine* which was published in October 1995, pages 119–120, the usefulness of the *Confession* is delineated by Rev Jack Sin as follows:

1. **The Confession is an excellent summary of sound biblical Christian doctrines.** It encapsulates all the major teachings of the Protestant faith in a succinct and yet comprehensive form.
2. **It is a guard against false teachings and practices.** This is the standard second to the Scriptures that we can refer to as a most helpful guide against all the insidious and aberrant teachings in the Christian world today.
3. **It is a form of catechism and substantive religious teachings.** What can be a better tool for teaching in our Sunday school or for those who seek water baptism but the Shorter Catechism with all the important truths covered in that wonderful question-and-answer method?
4. **It is a rallying point for sound Christian unity.** In the true spirit of Christian ecumenism (not the way the World Council of Churches [WCC] is doing today with all its unacceptable compromises), the Westminster Confession can serve as a unifying point for all true believers who adhere to the historic Christian faith, with the fundamentals of the Christian religion upheld and defended.
5. **Finally, it is to shape and regulate theological thinking and public teaching and preaching.** One of the best sources and places to teach the Word of God is to explain the doctrines contained in this peerless book to the growing congregation to build up and strengthen their most holy faith.

In summary, there are seven practical uses of a Reformed creed. Its usefulness can be summarised using the following alliteration (adapted and modified):

1. To **define** the theological standards of the church.
2. To **distinguish** a reformed church from others that hold to a different doctrinal position.
3. To **defend** the faith where there is an assault on the church and its beliefs.
4. To **disseminate** the doctrines of grace to the succeeding generations to come.
5. To **develop** sound and biblical inter-church relations with those who are like-minded in the faith.
6. To **disciple**, nurture and teach younger Christians in the faith.
7. To **deepen** our connection and understanding of the church in the past.

WELCOME TO NEW LIFE B-P CHURCH LONDON

CHURCH THEME: WALK IN THE NEWNESS OF LIFE (Romans 6:4)

Our **worship services** begin promptly at **11.00 am and 4.00 pm**.

Please stay back for Bible Study and fellowship lunch after the morning worship and for tea after the evening service. Do invite your friends to come to Church.

Worship Services			WELCOME
Morning	<i>Today: 05/08/2007</i>	<i>Next Week: 12/08/2007</i>	We extend a warm welcome to all worshippers this Lord's Day. We specially welcome Leonie Ada, Susy Curran and Mike Wylie to our morning worship service last Lord's Day.
<i>Chairman:</i>	Jonathan Kim	Pr Mok Chee Cheong	
<i>Preacher:</i>	Pr Mok Chee Cheong	Dr Tow Siang Hwa	
<i>Message:</i>	Seek Ye First The Kingdom Of God	Ready for His Return?	
<i>Text:</i>	Matthew 6:33	Matthew 24:35-44	
<i>Organist:</i>	Yanning	Anthony	
Evening			
<i>Chairman:</i>	John Poh	Jonathan Kim	
<i>Preacher:</i>	Pr Mok Chee Cheong	Dr Tow Siang Hwa	
<i>Message:</i>	The Blessing Of Giving	A Mighty Fortress is Our God	
<i>Text:</i>	Romans 12:8	2 Thessalonians 1:1-12	
<i>Pianist:</i>	Anthony	Yanning	
Other Duties			NEWS/ANNOUNCEMENTS
	<i>Today: 05/08/2007</i>	<i>Next Week: 12/08/2007</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One Day Seminar, Sat 11 Aug: Dr Tow Siang Hwa will be conducting the seminar, beginning at 3pm. There will be 3 sessions entitled "The Japanese War Years", "Providence, no Coincidence" and "Noah's Flood". Do invite your family and friends to this seminar. • Family Worship: Those who are interested in opening up their home for family worship in the month of August and September, please inform Pr Mok. • Sabbath School: Please note that class is held at the Library after the morning worship. You are encouraged to bring children of ages 6-12 for the lessons. Children of age 6 onwards are encouraged to sit with their parents during the main service. • Memory Verse for 2nd Quarter: For those who would like to carry out the memory verse review, please see Pr Mok. • Those serving on the Lord's Day: Please gather behind the pulpit area at 10.30am for prayer. • Lord's Supper: Next week, we will be observing the Lord's Supper. Please come with your hearts prepared.
<i>Ushers</i>	Wah Soon/Jee	Daniel/Joyce	
<i>Sunday Sch:</i>	Carol	Esmeralda	
<i>Lunch:</i>	Maureen	Constance	
<i>Washing-up:</i>	Volunteers	Volunteers	
<i>Bible Study:</i>	BBK	BBK	
Appointments of the Week			
Fri 10 Aug	7:30 pm	Young Adults Fellowship: No meeting	
Sat 11 Aug	3.00 pm	One Day Seminar: Spkr: Dr Tow Siang Hwa	
Last Week's Worship Service Collections			
Offering: £166.67		Lunch: £28.50	
Memory Verse			
<i>Previous Week (July 07 Wk 4): 2 Timothy 4:8</i>			
Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.			
<i>This Week (August 07 Wk 1): Matthew 6:33</i>			
But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.			